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Research Note

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MONTANA CHRISTMAS TREE SHIPMENTS REACH RECORD HIGH

Roscoe B. Herrington
Division of Forest Economics

More than 3.4 million Christmas trees were shipped from Montana in 1954. This is a new record for the Montana Christmas tree industry and exceeds the previous peak year of 1946 by 6 percent. The unusually mild, dry weather during the cutting period no doubt facilitated the record shipment this year. Christmas tree shipments during 1954 were 15 percent higher than in 1953 and 58 percent higher than in 1942.

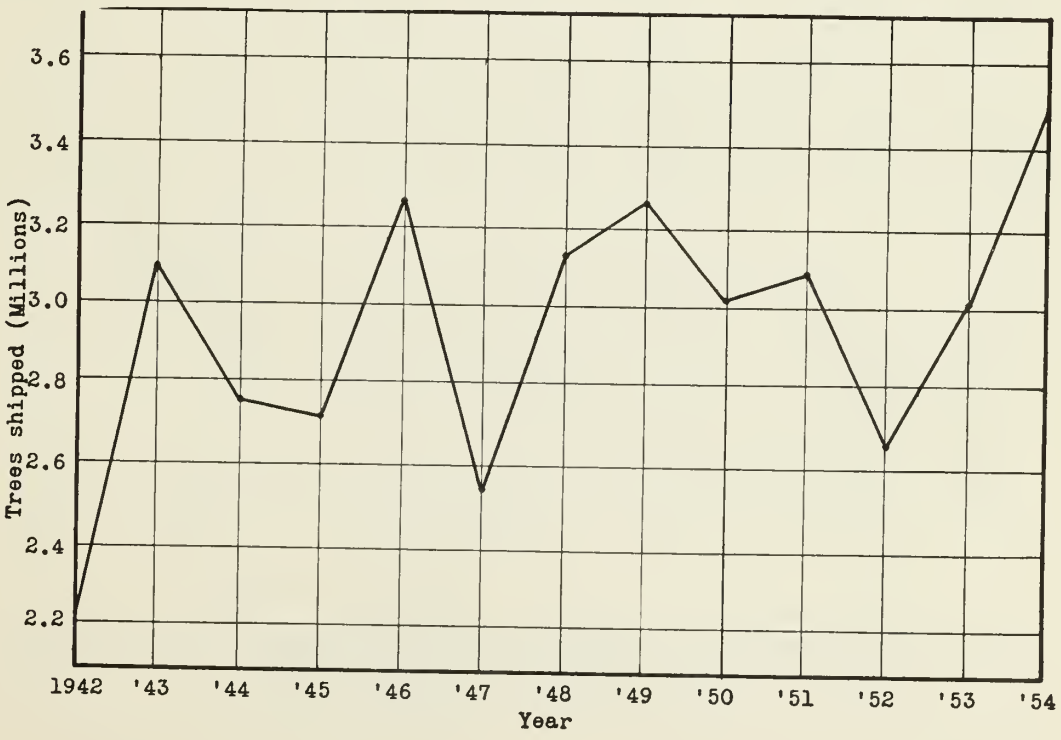

Fig. 1.--Montana Christmas tree shipments, 1942 to 1954.

Flathead and Lincoln Counties continued to lead as Montana's Christmas tree shipping center. These counties jointly shipped 60 percent of the 1954 Christmas tree crop. Missoula County shipped 22 percent of the crop. Very few shipments originated in counties east of the Continental Divide.

One of the significant trends is the extremely rapid increase in shipments from Missoula Counting during the last 3 years. Christmas tree shipments from this area have increased over 300 percent since 1951. During this same period shipments have decreased from both Flathead and Lincoln Counties. Flathead County shipments dropped 18 percent; Lincoln County shipments slipped 1 percent.

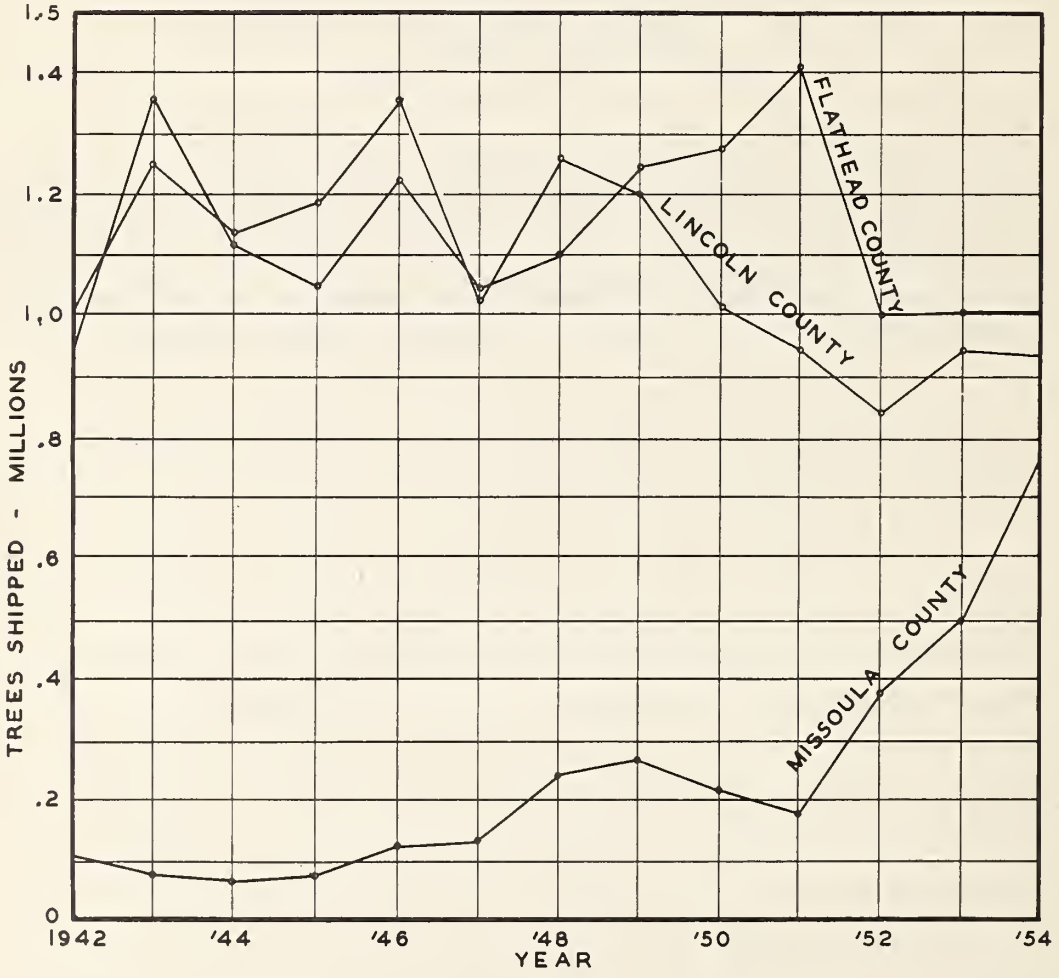

Figure 2.--Comparison of Christmas tree shipments from Flathead, Lincoln, and Missoula Counties, 1942 to 1954.

Montana trees were distributed to 25 states this year. Texas continued to be the greatest buyer. Sales to Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas were slightly lower than last year. Most of the trees were shipped to the Central States area as usual. The number of trees purchased by individual states within this area has varied widely over the years. For example, Illinois, the greatest single consumer from 1947 to 1950, now ranks fifth on the list of the 10 leading state markets for Montana trees. This variation in the quantity of Montana trees purchased is partially accounted for by the competition from other producing areas and by changes in the ultimate consumer's preference of the species and quality of Christmas tree to be used.

Table 1.--Rail shipments to leading markets for Montana Christmas trees, 1954 and 1953

1954		1953	
State	Trees	State	Trees
Texas	484,500	Texas	351,500
Iowa	337,250	Iowa	342,000
Missouri	323,000	Oklahoma	251,750
Oklahoma	304,000	Missouri	228,000
Illinois	285,000	Illinois	223,250
Nebraska	190,000	Nebraska	213,750
Kansas	171,000	Kansas	209,000
California	166,250	Louisiana	90,250
Louisiana	123,500	Minnesota	66,500
South Dakota	61,750	California	57,000

Canada exported 123,076 trees to Montana in 1954. This was 3.5 percent of the number of trees shipped from Montana and is a slight increase over the number of trees imported from Canada in 1953. Generally the annual interstate shipment of Montana Christmas trees includes 1 to 4 percent of Canadian trees.

Table 2.--Christmas trees imported from Canada to Montana

Year	Total number of trees imported	Percent of total shipped
1946	107,570	3.3
1947	89,944	3.6
1948	67,664	2.2
1949	54,050	1.7
1950	39,288	1.3
1951	72,036	2.3
1952	99,918	3.8
1953	99,055	3.3
1954	123,076	3.5

As usual, the majority of Montana Christmas trees were shipped by rail. However, a larger percentage than before is now being trucked out of the state. During 1954 the railroads handled 79 percent, while 21 percent of the trees were moved by truck. In earlier years the railroads moved as high as 97 percent of the total Christmas tree shipments.

Table 3.--Comparison of truck and railroad Christmas tree shipments from Montana, 1942 - 1954

Year	Percent shipped by rail	Percent shipped by truck
1942	97	3
1943	94	6
1944	96	4
1945	94	6
1946	87	13
1947	88	12
1948	88	12
1949	87	13
1950	89	11
1951	90	10
1952	90	10
1953	79	21
1954	79	21

Table 4.--Total 1954 shipment of Christmas trees from Montana

County	Rail shipments 1/	Truck shipments	Total	Percent of total
Flathead	1,007,000	156,230	1,163,230	33
Lincoln	902,500	43,223	945,723	27
Missoula	375,250	403,594	778,844	22
Lake	275,500	31,115	306,615	9
Sanders	142,500	15,052	157,552	5
Ravalli	28,500	58,433	86,933	3
Mineral	23,750	-	23,750	1
Granite	4,750	10,018	14,768	2/
Powell	-	2,053	2,053	2/
Other	-	2,900	2,900	2/
Total	2,759,750	722,618	3,482,368	100
Percent of total	79	21	100	

1/ Data from reports by the Northern Pacific, Great Northern, and Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railway Companies.

2/ Less than 0.5 percent.

Reports from concentration yard operators indicate that demand for smaller apartment-sized trees is increasing. The buying trend appears to have shifted to trees of the 4- to 6-foot class. Two factors have been suggested as explanations of this trend. First, a large tree interferes with the TV set in the average room. Second, the decorations and lights are more expensive for a large tree than a small tree.1/

This report covers only Christmas tree shipments. It is not practical to prepare a survey of production because of the large number of operators and the nomadic nature of the business. This report is based on shipment data from the three major railroads in Montana, the Customs Service, the Montana State Forester, the national forests, and the University of Montana. We estimate that these shipments account for 95 percent of the total production. The remaining 5 percent is unreported truck shipments and trees sold locally.

1/ Metcalf, Woodbridge. Christmas trees in California - 1953. University of California Ext. Serv. 1954.